

Rogozin Calls Libya a NATO War for Oil

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BRUSSELS — Russia's envoy to NATO said Friday that the alliance's war effort in Libya marks a major strategic shift to focusing on securing oil and gas supplies for the West.

The envoy, Dmitry Rogozin, described NATO's intervention in Libya as legitimate because it was aimed at protecting civilians, but he said Russia believes that the underlying reason was access to Libyan oil.

"For Russia, NATO's operation in Libya indicated that the major interests of the alliance now lie not in Europe's East — where its adversaries the Warsaw Pact and the Soviet Union used to be — but in oil-rich lands of Northern Africa and the Middle East," Rogozin said in an e-mail.

Moscow was critical of NATO's bombing campaign, saying the unrelenting airstrikes overstepped the limited UN Security Council resolution that authorized the defense of the civilian population.

NATO says it is fully complying with the UN mandate, and that forces loyal to Moammar Gadhafi still pose a threat to Libya's civilians. The alliance also has rejected criticism

from Russia, China and the African Union, which tried to get the warring sides in Libya to end the bloodshed through a negotiated settlement.

NATO Secretary-General Anders Fogh Rasmussen, asked about Rogozin's comments after a Paris meeting with French President Nicolas Sarkozy, insisted that the alliance did not stray from its UN authorization.

"We carried out our operations in Libya strictly in conformity with the United Nations mandate, which is to say we've carried them [the airstrikes] out to protect the civilian population in Libya — no more, no less," he said.

Alliance warplanes have flown more than 20,000 sorties, including about 8,000 strike missions against Gadhafi's forces.

Despite its reservations, Russia gave a boost to Thursday's international conference in Paris on Libya's future by recognizing the opposition movement as the country's interim leadership. Russia's envoy to the talks said Russia wants to defend its economic interests in Libya.

But Rogozin noted that Moscow would not allow any UN resolution condemning human rights violations in Syria because of fears that it could provide the pretext for an all-out Western military onslaught on that country akin to the bombing campaign against Libya, now in its sixth month.

Rogozin said the Arab Spring is shaking the Muslim world and replacing longtime dictators with "new powers who support radical Islamic politics."

"This is why the intervention of the Western countries into the situation in the Middle East in order to get the hydrocarbons is assessed as a very risky gamble, almost as dangerous as a stroll through a minefield," he said.

A Libyan official said Friday that five foreign oil and gas companies have returned to Libya to resuscitate production choked off by civil war and sanctions. Aref Ali Nayed, a member of the Libyan interim government's so-called stabilization team, named Italy's Eni as one of the companies but said he could not provide the names of the other four.

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